

Sharp rise in number of inmates projected Prison study faults get-tough policies

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By Stephen Ohlemacher, Associated Press | February 15, 2007

WASHINGTON -- Get-tough policies aimed at locking up offenders longer are propelling a projected increase of nearly 200,000 in the nation's prison population in the next five years, according to a private study released yesterday.

The Pew Charitable Trusts' study projects that the increase will be three times faster than the overall population growth in the United States and will cost states more than \$27 billion.

"As a country, we have a problem," said Susan Urahn, managing director of policy initiatives for the Pew Charitable Trusts, which funded the study by its Public Safety Performance Project.

The study is the first of its kind to project prison populations in every state through 2011, based on state projections, current criminal justice policies, and demographic trends.

Urahn said she hopes states use the study to prepare for the future, either by building more prisons or by adopting policies to slow the growth through alternative forms of punishment.

The projections, she said, are not inevitable; they can be altered by state policies as well as economic and cultural changes.

"What we have seen is there are a growing number of states really focused not on being tough on crime or soft on crime, but on being smart about crime," Urahn said. "Every state faces unique circumstance and challenges."

There are more than 1.5 million inmates in the nation's state and federal prisons, a number that is projected to grow to more than 1.7 million by the end of 2011, an increase of about 13 percent.

The nation's population, by comparison, is projected to grow by 4.5 percent in that time.

States are projected to spend up to \$27.5 billion on the new inmates, including \$12.5 billion in construction costs, according to the study.

Men far outnumber women in prison, nearly 14 to 1. But in the next five years, the number of women inmates is projected to increase by 16 percent compared with a 12 percent increase for men.

Florida is projected to add the most prisoners, about 16,000, followed by California, Texas, Arizona, and Ohio. New York, Connecticut, and Delaware are the only states with no projected growth in the number

of inmates.

Florida's prison population has been growing since the 1980s, when many inmates had to be released early because of crowding problems, said William Bales, associate professor of criminology and criminal justice at Florida State University.

Since then, the state has eased crowding by building more prisons and changing the way it sentences offenders, Bales said.

The state eliminated parole and other forms of early release, but only 20 percent of those eligible for prison are sent there, he said.

Instead, many lesser offenders are sentenced to home confinement and required to wear electronic monitoring devices.

"But if you go to prison, you will go for a long time," Bales said.

For more information on the Public Safety Performance Project, go to [www.pewtrusts.com/ideas/](http://www.pewtrusts.com/ideas/index.cfm?issue51) index.cfm?issue51 . ■